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ABSTRACT

Rural teachers face difficulties (lower salaries, inadequate facilities, isolated living, scant inservice training, and inadequate housing) not found in urban school districts, and most have not been prepared for rural life and teaching by their teacher education programs. Specialized training for rural teachers is practically non-existent; most teacher training programs prepare teachers for urban schools. Higher education institutions should understand the unique weaknesses inherent in many rural schools and communities. Teacher training programs should support rural teachers with adequate preservice education and continuing inservice education throughout the teacher's careers. Teacher education programs should provide a rural education specialty and should establish relationships with rural schools, so student teachers can be trained in rural school districts. The programs should also support the development of curriculum materials that enhance the picture of rural life. Institutions of higher education can apply these ideas inexpensively by supporting state rural education associations, encouraging frequent college-rural meetings, holding workshops and conferences for rural educators only, supporting teacher exchanges, offering advanced degree programs to rural educators, encouraging students who want to student teach in rural communities, permitting students to teach experimental minicourses in rural schools, and providing lists of prospective rural teachers to superintendents in small communities. (SB)

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The Role of Higher Education in Rural Education

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A well known nursery rhyme speaks of the plight of a little old lady who lived in a shoe. She was beset with so many children that she didn't know what to do. In order to eliminate the problem and undoubtedly keep her sanity she gave them some broth and whipped them all soundly and sent them all to bed. The harried housewife's simple solution to a perplexing problem may seem simplistic to many but similar approaches may be observed readily. Colleges of education are a case in point. All too frequently these teacher training institutions handle a myriad of problems and/or tasks with single solutions. Teacher training programs are often the same for each student regardless of major or teaching (public, private, business, home, school, etc.) interest. Inservice training for teachers, too often only considered a graduate degree program, is likewise a rigid system built upon a graduate school philosophy of maintaining the "status quo" regardless of the needs of and changes in school operating procedures. Over the decades and unfortunately through the 80's graduate programs will continue to require two consecutive semesters of residency, a set selection of courses that are required or elective, and course work confined to school settings.

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The challenges of today and the years to come are indeed complex. A single curriculum will not be best suited to all students. In a most important way, the question needs to be asked of administrators and professors of teacher training institutions as to whether the education offered to their students and to educational personnel in the public and private schools is appropriate as a means of preparing them for the community, students and school that they are in or will enter.

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Are communities different? Obviously, they are, based upon uncountable factors ranging from size and geographical location to ethnic makeup and economic potential. A number of universities (approx. 60) discovered that urban and inner-city schools were different and special programs were needed for those teachers who wished to work or did work in these communities. These schools provide specialized training for the urban directed and oriented teacher. Interesting enough, the other end of the community spectrum has been overlooked. Specialized training for rural school teachers is practically nonexistent. A number of college deans are not even aware that differences exist. In an effort to determine how many universities were involved in some specific way in working with rural needs in education the writer received comments of this nature from college professors about the country.

1. Rural programs should be limited to a few institutions.
2. I see no need for our institutions to have such a program.
3. I would not support any such movement on my own campus.
4. I doubt that we could justify a special program.

This attitude may not represent the feelings of most college educators but the fact that few institutions offer courses or workshops specifically designed for those seeking or working in rural schools would at least suggest a definite lack of concern. Most colleges of education will verbally endorse and even proudly point to their efforts to train teachers to individualize instruction and meet the needs of all youth. Unfortunately, many of these schools prepare new teachers to teach primarily in city schools. Graduate courses and workshops are typically planned for the urban teacher and the content of the instruction is focused upon the problems of metropolitan areas.

The inability of higher education to respond to the needs of rural

education has analogy in the efforts of western states sheep owners to bring to attention to legislatures the effects of coyotes predations upon sheep. Conservationists stress saving the coyote rather than destroying them. Sheep herders point to increased sheep killings as coyote bands increase in numbers. A resultant car bumper sticker reported the viewpoint of the sheep owner, "Eat mutton, 20,000 coyotes can't be wrong." In a similar vein rural dwellers could readily report, "There's more than coyotes and sheep in the country, in fact, one-third of the population of the United States lives there."

It is very necessary that those involved in higher education understand the unique weaknesses inherent in many rural schools. The problems confronting rural America, such as poverty, substandard housing, deficient medical services and providing quality education are among the most serious in the United States today. A child born in a rural location has approximately one chance in four of belonging to a family whose income is at a substandard level. The rural child, in comparison to the typical urban dwelling youngster, will have fewer opportunities to study in a particular subject area and will have fewer chances to become prepared for post high school experiences.

In addition, the more isolated, rural school youth are not as motivated to continue with post high school education and feel less confident in competing with their urban counterparts. By and large the rural youth of working age have less than one chance in four of finding gainful employment in local communities.

The rural school teacher is beset by many difficulties not often found in the urban schools. Lower teacher salaries, inadequate physical facilities in many schools and living in isolated small communities may present disappointing circumstances to the new teacher. Since most teachers are trained in urban areas they obviously are desirous of remaining in that geographical setting.

When new teachers take rural school positions they often do so as a second choice and only intend to stay until they can move to a metropolitan school.

The truly professional educator is desirous of inservice training and the opportunity for continued professional growth. To the rural teacher, professional growth often means the added expense and burden of moving each summer to attend a college campus for course work. The urban teacher, on the other hand, may only need to "cross the street" to receive such training.

The typical city-based school of education does not direct attention to programs that encourage, train and prepare teachers for life in rural schools and communities because the problems and needs that the school observes come from the immediate area. It is obvious too, that for practical reasons, providing teaching experiences for students would be more easily accomplished in nearby larger schools. Following suit, the professors who teach the methods classes and supervise the student teachers have had little exposure to rural experiences and the needs of rural schools.

The Specific Needs of Rural School Districts

Rural schools are similar to metropolitan schools in many respects. Both sections report that finances for schools are continuing to be an increasing and continued problem. The hiring of quality teachers is always a time diminishing task for rural and urban administrators. Schools also attempt to take advantage of the numerous state and federal grants offered through Title I, IV, Career Education, Right to Read, Gifted Education, CETA, etc. These same governmental agencies issue school requirements that necessitate considerable school effort to reach compliance. In the area of curriculum, all schools need a strong foundation in teaching the basic skills and also in emphasizing practical skills. A focus upon the community and world of work is noted in the escalating school career education programs.

While those areas of concern mentioned above, as well as many others not listed, are priorities of all school districts, the ability to resolve the problems and conditions pose striking differences between the urban and rural systems. Financial shortages affect the rural school more than the urban one. Obviously, the salary paid to school personnel will affect a school district's ability to attract talent and to keep the morale of teaching staffs at a high level. Rural schools cannot offer the kinds of salaries that urban, suburban or larger districts offer. Salary is not the only issue. In making a decision as whether to teach in a rural or metropolitan setting the teachers must consider these conditions:

Rural Factors	Urban Factors
1. Few student teachers are able to request and be assigned a small school setting over 40 miles away from the university or college they are attending.	1. Most teacher training programs are in urban areas. Teachers want to work where they have lived and have been successful. Statistics show that most teachers will take a job in the school district where they did their student teaching.
2. Rural teaching is more complicated. Teachers generally teach 5-6 different preparations each day. Extra curricular assignments (coaching, clubs, civic responsibilities, etc.) are almost always expected.	2. Urban teachers average 2-4 different teaching preparations each day. Extra curricular assignments are not frequent and usually pay some stipend.
3. Rural teachers generally have difficulty in securing adequate housing near the school location. Living conditions are generally poorer than urban areas although the rents are usually lower.	3. Urban teachers usually have a varied selection of homes from which to rent or purchase. Usually costs are higher, but so are salaries. Also it is easier for the spouse to find work to supplement the school teacher's income.
4. Inservice experiences are lacking. Extensive travel is required to attend inservice workshops. Teachers must move to city areas during summers to work on advanced degrees.	4. Inservice training is often conducted in the school district or nearby university. A higher percentage of urban teachers obtain masters degrees and enter doctoral programs.

5. Geographic isolation creates conditions of less social activities, fewer health services, higher costs of maintaining household goods and results in higher teacher turnover.	5. Location to city center and adjoining service areas provides various cultural and social activities. Medical facilities are readily available as well as ample shopping outlets.
6. Teachers are more apt to be teaching subjects in other than their academic major. They will also be more apt to have multiple grades in one classroom.	6. Teachers generally teach only in their major.
7. Specialized classes and programs are more difficult to maintain, staff and conduct creating lack of continuity and added costs to the districts.	7. City schools offer many more courses and programs for students. It is not uncommon to find a number of capable high school students taking courses at nearby colleges.

It is apparent from the brief list of school factors listed above that teachers in rural schools require considerable assistance in meeting the requirements of rural living and school employment. New teachers in particular need to be prepared to understand and live comfortably in a rural environment. They must have developed the ability to live happily away from the center of cultural activities which the metropolitan areas provide and to enjoy the satisfaction of associations with the people with whom they will work and play in a very close relationsip. The on-the-job rural teacher needs constant reinforcement as to ability and worth. Frequent inservice training is necessary for these teachers to keep abreast of new materials and ideas in the subject areas. The rural teacher cannot gain the necessary experience and skills necessary to maintain competency unless teacher training institutions serve as active interested agents in promoting rural education.

Higher Education's Role in Improving Rural Education

The past strategy of preparing all teacher trainees with the most recent knowledge in their field, a somewhat similar dose of teaching methods and a limited amount of practice teaching in selected urban schools is not adequate

to improve the rural schools in any significant manner. Not only initial training of teachers but follow-up support is indispensable to helping rural students in the learning and growing process.

It is vitally essential that teacher training institutions develop new approaches to teacher education. Teacher education must be responsive to the needs of our educational system, especially the needs of the hundreds of rural school districts located in every part of the United States. The following recommendations are offered as positive directives for helping the rural schools. Collectively, they would represent a broad and aggressive educational reform. Adoption on an individualized item basis would suggest that the college of education is engaged in planning for a brighter future for rural schools.

1. Rural Education Specialty: Specialists are in demand in colleges of education today more than ever before. Specialists are advocates for their programs and they are in a position to render invaluable aid to these individuals who work or want experience in their area of specialization. Only specialists can adequately teach reading, engage in program evaluation, initiate career education programs, teach in ghetto schools, work with learning disabilities, or assist rural education. A specialist in rural education would be better able to gain the respect of practitioners in rural schools because he/she would be able to provide leadership in inservice training, curriculum development, state rural education associations, rural education interest groups; etc., as well as encourage and assist in the training of prospective teachers who wish to work in rural schools. A best method of advertizing this specialist is to generate new positions, offers, or departments in the college indicating rural education to be a major responsibility. To their credit, at least a half dozen major colleges have recently established rural education centers or designations to indicate a vital concern for rural education.

2. School-College Relationships: Training of teachers should take place only partly on campus. The other part should be in selected school districts. Students who are training to be teachers should have a choice of "training centers" that they might attend. It is also not necessary that a training center be located within every driving distance of the college. Studies have indicated that students who live near the location of student teaching will develop an attachment to that area or type of location.

Much can also be gained from enlisting the aid of rural educators. Rural teachers and administrators selected for their skill and ability can easily assume some of the responsibility for supervising the work of

the student teacher. The teacher training institution must learn to utilize, in positive and productive ways, the public school system, regional education service agencies, state educational agencies, teacher groups and others within the community interested in the school children and their welfare.

3. Preservice and Inservice Education: These two important functions are interrelated and interacting components, yet are too often considered as distinct and unrelated groups. The goal of colleges should be involvement of the training process from preparation extending throughout the career of the educator. Continuous inservice training that is relevant and geared to the needs of the local school staff members should be available. As much as possible this training should be brought to the public school campus. Obviously, as professors leave the university campus and attend rural centers or school districts on a regular basis they will become more knowledgeable and reeducated to the actualities of schooling in the country.

4. Curriculum Development: The textbooks currently used by teachers tend to be urban oriented. Rural teachers are required to adapt textual materials to their rural situation. Too often rural schools have had to borrow from their "big brothers" to initiate school programs such as reading, career education, gifted and talented, etc. The university can provide support to the school districts in the development of new "ruralized" materials as well as methods in working effectively with the natural materials found in the local setting. A well integrated curriculum (one that portrays ruralism as a desirable aspect of American life) will serve to help young students develop a proud sense of belonging and of being of equal importance as urban students.

Practical applications of the recommendations are easy to find and do not have to be expensive. Just the attempt of wanting to help rural school educators will bring big dividends in better college/school relationships

Colleges can display a forward direction in supporting rural education through:

-supporting state rural education associations. Such oganizations now exist in Oregon, Utah, Iowa and Texas.
-listing the establishment of a director of rural education in the college.
-encouraging frequent meetings among rural school districts, regional service centers and college personnel to discuss rural problems.
-offering master degree and doctoral programs to select groups of rural educators. By doing this the total program emphasis can be upon rural problems. BYU has an intern doctoral program that permits educators to gain residency in two consecutive summer terms rather than leaving a job to return to college for a year.
-supporting teacher exchanges when the college replaces the teachers in a school with their students. The university students gain valuable teaching experiences for a few days in a rural school setting while the regular teachers are free to receive valuable inservice training.

-permitting college students to experiment with teaching by presenting minicourses in rural school locations. Student teacher trainers in biology, home economics, history, etc., prepare a list of presentable topics of interest to school age students. The school teachers select the topics that they would like presented and a schedule for one or two days is constructed. The school district pays for any materials used during the presentations.
-encouraging workshops and conferences for rural educators only. Their meetings can be held on campus and provide credit if desired by the rural teachers and administrators. Too often rural educators attend general conferences and are forced to listen to the large schools talk about their problems. Conference for rural educators should be jointly planned by the college and local school districts.
-providing support to students who want to student teach in a rural community. This type of endeavor practically insures that the new teacher will want a rural teaching position. The impact of just one student teacher for a semester in a small school can dramatically raise teacher morale and enthusiasm of the entire staff. New ideas brought in by the student teacher gain rapid infusion into the teaching staff.
-providing a list of prospective rural teachers to superintendents in small communities. Superintendents will often travel many miles to interview teachers and find that the teacher's main desire is to locate in an urban area but that they will teach in a rural school if nothing else opens. Needless to say, the teacher who wants to teach in a rural setting usually has no difficulty in finding a position but they often need assistance in being directed to available openings.

Rural educators will gladly accept any help that they can in making the rural school a better learning environment for the child. It is the role of higher education to support the rural schools in preparing school personnel who are effective and can continue to make worthwhile contributions.

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